

CLASSIFICATION OFFICE DECISION

Title of publication: Fifty Shades Of Grey

Other known title(s): Not stated

OFLC ref: 1200609.000

Medium: Book

Distributor: Random House Publications

Author: E L James

Publisher: Arrow Books

Country of origin: United Kingdom

Language: English

Applicant: Secretary for Internal Affairs

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| Classification: | Unrestricted: Suitable for mature audiences 16 years of age and over. |
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Descriptive note: Contains sex scenes.

Display conditions: None

Date of entry in Register: 20 September 2012

Date of direction to issue a label: 20 September 2012

Date of notice of decision: 20 September 2012

Summary of reasons for decision:

Fifty Shades Of Grey is an erotic novel about a budding romance between a 21-year-old university student Anastasia Steele and Christian Grey, a 27-year-old business tycoon. The book is a first person narrative from Anastasia's perspective. Anastasia is scandalized yet titillated by Christian's erotic tastes and expectations, and falls in love with him over the course of the book. The book was submitted because of a concern regarding the book's availability to readers of any age.

The novel is aimed at women and explores a dominant/submissive romantic relationship. Although it has limited literary merit, Fifty Shades Of Grey is a publishing phenomenon that has become part of popular culture. It has gained enormous commercial success, and there are two sequels available. The writing has inspired many parodies, and the release of many similar titles.

The mainstream success of the novel has been credited with allowing some women to talk about sex in a socially permissible manner.

The book's unrestricted availability is unlikely to be injurious to the public good. The sexual material in the book is clearly intended for mature audiences 16 years of age and over. While the novel deals with an adult sexual relationship and sexual activity in a descriptive manner, the dominant tone is of overwrought romance which would be unlikely to be read by children. The book is representative of a widely available genre of erotic literature whose intended audience is predominantly women. Concerns regarding content that may be sexually abusive or violent are unfounded. The dominant/submissive behaviour sometimes engaged in by the two characters is presented as part of a consensual loving relationship and is unlikely to seriously disturb adolescent readers or influence their behaviour. The Classification Office concurs with the publisher's submission which states that there is "little suggestion" that the book's wide availability and enormous popularity is causing harm to "impressionable youngsters". To date, the Classification Office has received only one complaint about the book.

The Classification Office has considered the effects of the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990 on the application of all the classification criteria. There are many other books with generally unrestricted availability that have similar erotic content or sexual descriptions to Fifty Shades Of Grey, some of them literary classics or popular fiction blockbusters in their own right. This would make a restriction on Fifty Shades Of Grey arbitrary and unfair. It would create a widespread inconsistency in conditions of access to books of this nature, one which would not be 'demonstrably justified' on the basis of the sexual content in this book. Concerns about children or young persons are adequately addressed by a classification indicating the book's suitability for mature audiences and a label that indicates its sexual content.